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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 350th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 5 April 2013, at 10.30 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Diallo ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Update on developments since the previous meeting of the Committee

2. **The Chair** said that Cyprus, Sweden and Lithuania had upgraded the status of the Palestinian diplomatic missions in those countries. On 10 February, Israel had approved the construction of 346 new settlement homes. On 13 and 14 February, Japan and the State of Palestine had co-organized, in Tokyo, the Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development. On 22 February, Palestinian officials had demanded an international investigation into the death of the Palestinian Arafat Jaradat during his imprisonment in an Israeli jail. On 27 and 28 February, the Committee had convened, in Rome, the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People. On 6 March, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had released a report on the ill-treatment of Palestinian child detainees by Israel. On 19 March, at a meeting in Brussels, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee had called on donors to help close the financing gap faced by the Palestinian Government in 2013, which was estimated to be $1.2 billion. On 22 March, the United States of America had unblocked nearly $500 million in aid to the State of Palestine. On 25 March, Israel had resumed the transfers of tax revenues collected on behalf of the State of Palestine which had been withheld. On 26 March, at the 2013 Summit of the League of Arab States, held in Doha, Qatar had called for the establishment of a $1-billion fund for East Jerusalem and had offered to contribute $250 million. It had also called for a smaller-scale Arab League summit to be held in Cairo in order to promote Palestinian reconciliation.

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and developments in the political process

3. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the situation on the ground remained volatile. The death of a Palestinian prisoner from cancer that had gone untreated in an Israeli prison had led to widespread protests and the subsequent killing of two Palestinian teenagers by the Israeli military. A letter concerning the situation of Palestinian prisoners was being sent to the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council and would be circulated to United Nations Member States. The increased sense of frustration among the Palestinian people had led to clashes in the Gaza Strip, which continued to struggle under Israel's immoral and illegal blockade, with Israeli leaders threatening to initiate a large military operation in the area. Furthermore, Israel continued to divide East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied West Bank through its displacements of Palestinian families, home demolitions and construction of illegal settlements.

4. On the political front, United States President Barack Obama had visited Ramallah and Bethlehem, and the Secretary of State, John Kerry, would be meeting with Israeli and Palestinian leaders in an effort to advance the political process. Israel remained defiant on the issue of settlements, despite international consensus concerning their unlawful nature. Negotiations could be reinitiated only when such activities ceased. A commitment by the Israeli Government to release Palestinian prisoners, including those imprisoned before the signing of the Oslo Accords, and fulfilment of the commitment made by former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert to release 1,000 prisoners would also constitute positive steps towards reopening negotiations.

5. He expressed the hope that Secretary Kerry could help bring Israel into line with the position set out by President Obama in May 2011, to the effect that the occupation begun in 1967 should end and that negotiations between the two sides should begin on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders. Israeli compliance with those conditions, as well as the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, would lay the foundation for a meaningful dialogue. The Palestinian authorities had been doing their utmost to support the peace process. Achieving an independent Palestinian State through a two-State solution required the international political will to bring Israel into compliance with international law, in particular with regard to settlement activities.

6. At its 2013 Summit, the League of Arab States had decided to form a ministerial delegation on the question of Palestine, which would be led by the Prime Minister of Qatar and would include the Secretary-General of the League and representatives from the region; the delegation would be meeting with Secretary of State

Kerry. In addition, it was hoped that the delegation would be able to participate in the open debate of the Security Council scheduled for 24 April and to meet with the Secretary-General of the United Nations in order to demonstrate the support of Arab States for the political process. He invited Committee members to participate in the Security Council debate to demonstrate that 2013 was a critical year for salvaging the two-State solution. Lastly, he hoped that all Committee members and observers would attend the special meeting of the Committee to be held in Caracas on 17 and 18 April.

7. **Mr. Mcakuvana** (South Africa) said that his Government was concerned about the impasse in the political process, and hoped that a new Israeli Government would remove the obstacles to peace talks by halting the construction of settlements. The news that Israel had resumed transfers of tax revenues to Palestine was long overdue, as the funds should never have been withheld.

8. He expressed concern for the plight of imprisoned Palestinians and condemned the death of Maysara Abu Hamdiya, which had been the result of neglect of his illness. He called on the Israeli Government to respect the human rights of Palestinian prisoners, in line with the Geneva Conventions. The Committee had addressed the issue of prisoners in the past, with little response from Israel. He suggested that the Committee should reflect on the issue anew with a view to proposing new actions.

Invitation by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to hold a Committee meeting in Caracas, 17 and 18 April 2013

9. **The Chair** said that the Bureau had welcomed a generous offer from the Venezuelan Government to host a special meeting of the Committee. The fact that the meeting would be that State's first major foreign policy initiative following its presidential election was a testament to the importance it attached to the Palestinian cause. The Government's commitment to the State of Palestine, as well as its peaceful and independent foreign policy, was much appreciated by the Committee.

10. **Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his Government reiterated its solidarity with the Palestinian people in the wake of the recent deaths of a former leader in prison and two Palestinian teenagers, and called for the release of all Palestinian prisoners.

11. On 12 December 2012, Venezuelan authorities had met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority, Riyad Al-Maliki, in order to discuss measures that would mitigate the sanctions that were being imposed on the Palestinian people in response to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19, which had accorded to Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations. Subsequently, the Venezuelan Government had offered to host a Committee meeting in Caracas on 17 and 18 April 2013; the Bureau had endorsed the proposal at the February 2013 United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People. A formal invitation, which had been sent to all members and observers on 1 April, had set out the two major topics approved by the Bureau: the effects of resolution 67/19 and initiatives to strengthen solidarity with the Palestinian people.

12. The Government of Venezuela would be covering the costs of participating members and some of the costs of observers. The agenda for the meeting included an opening ceremony, two round tables on the topics of the meeting and closing remarks by the Venezuelan President. He urged members and observers to indicate whether they would be participating in the meeting as soon as possible, as the country would be holding presidential elections on 14 April and thousands of people would be travelling to Venezuela.

13. **Mr. Reyes Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that it was important to recognize the efforts being made by the Venezuelan Government to hold the special meeting. Following the death of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez on 5 March 2013, a major national electoral campaign had been the focus of the country, including its consulates, which were busy assisting expatriates participating in the electoral process. The decision to proceed with the meeting at such a difficult time attested to the commitment of Venezuela, and the entire Latin American region, to the Palestinian cause. His Government would be represented at the meeting and urged all Committee members to participate.

Report on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, Rome, 27 and 28 February 2013

14. **Mr. Grima** (Malta), Rapporteur, said that the theme of the 2013 United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held on 27 and 28 February at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome, had been "Assistance to the Palestinians: challenges and opportunities in the new reality of a State under occupation". The Seminar had been attended by representatives of 55 Governments, including that of the State of Palestine, 7 intergovernmental organizations, 8 United Nations system entities and 34 civil society organizations. Three Italian academics had participated as discussants, offering reflections on the speakers' interventions and bringing a fresh perspective to the debate. The Committee had been represented by a delegation made up of the Chair, the two Vice-Chairs, the Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, and himself.

15. The opening session had included a message from the Secretary-General, which had stressed the importance of concrete progress towards a two-State solution to the future of Palestinian institutions. The Secretary-General had also expressed concern at Israel's continued settlement expansion and the financial crisis faced by the Palestinian Government. In that regard, he had reiterated the importance of the timely and predictable transfer of Palestinian tax and customs revenues, which had been withheld by Israel following the General Assembly's admission of the State of Palestine as a non-member observer State, and had renewed his call on donors to fulfil their pledges and increase their support.

16. In his opening statement, the Chair of the Committee had drawn attention to the deplorable economic reprisals imposed on the State of Palestine by Israel in response to General Assembly resolution 67/19 and had urged the international community to take action on the political, economic and legal fronts to support the resumption of meaningful negotiations, Palestinian reconciliation, the strengthening of Palestinian institutions and the lifting of the blockade on Gaza. The representative of FAO had highlighted that organization's efforts to improve food and nutrition security throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to assist its agricultural sector.

17. At the opening session, the Minister of Finance of the State of Palestine had delivered the keynote address, which had focused on the limits placed on the Palestinian economy by the occupation and the Government's lack of control over its economic affairs. The 1994 Paris Protocol had created a one-sided customs union, whereby Palestinian goods and services were largely excluded from the Israeli market. The Minister had drawn attention to Israel's numerous violations of the Protocol and had called for mechanisms to ensure that it was properly implemented. He had described the change in the status of the State of Palestine in the General Assembly as cause for hope and had urged donors to support Palestinian institution-building efforts. Donors could challenge Israeli policies by supporting projects in Gaza, projects that helped connect East Jerusalem with the rest of the West Bank and projects in Area C. He had also noted the importance of properly labelling and boycotting settlement products and ensuring that companies that profited from the occupation were held accountable. Lastly, he had stressed that political progress was closely linked to economic progress and should be equally promoted.

18. The first plenary session had focused on the socioeconomic and humanitarian impact of the occupation, including land confiscation, home demolitions, restrictions on movement, the lack of protection of Palestinians in the West Bank, and the dire unemployment rates and life-threatening water shortage in Gaza. There had also been discussion of the effects on women, as the occupation had contributed to gender inequalities in the job market and had altered traditional family structures and gender relations. The participating experts had pointed to the Israeli Government's political strategy of maintaining the status quo of a low-level conflict in order to ensure political and economic stability in Israel. The expansion of settlements was an expression of that policy, as it allowed the Government to provide affordable housing while consolidating Israeli control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

19. At the second plenary session, the experts had discussed ways to address financial challenges while continuing to strengthen economic development and State institutions. The agricultural sector, which had not realized its potential in terms of production and employment owing to the occupation, had been identified as a strategic and resilient component of the

economy that was capable of sustainable recovery. Increased access to land, water and markets, as well as investment in infrastructure, could help to expand available irrigated land and increase the gross domestic product; strong political will and investment in the Gaza Strip economy were both required to remedy the current situation. In addition, the State of Palestine would need to be freed of its forced dependency on the Israeli economy and develop a vigorous private sector. Economic growth and strong institutions depended on good governance; in that regard, efforts should focus on the rule of law, public sector integrity and e-governance.

20. The third plenary session had focused on the role of the international community, in particular Europe, in supporting the Palestinian economy. The representative of the European Union had stressed that the Union's financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority was geared to the larger political goal of achieving an independent Palestinian State. Participants had agreed that the precarious situation in the State of Palestine was a man-made result of the occupation and that the contributing factors were political rather than economic. Development efforts would therefore be ineffective if they were not also focused on ending the occupation. The crucial role played by civil society in development efforts had been highlighted throughout the Seminar.

21. All of the documentation relating to the Seminar, including the Chair's summary, was available on the website of the Division for Palestinian Rights. In addition, a comprehensive report on the Seminar would be issued as a United Nations publication.

22. Following the Seminar, on 1 March 2013, the Committee delegation had met with civil society organizations working on the question of Palestine. Those consultations, which had been attended by 21 participants representing civil society organizations in the State of Palestine, Israel, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Egypt and other countries, had focused on civil society projects, including the non-violent struggle against settlements, support for Area C and humanitarian assistance for the Gaza Strip. Representatives of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine had also provided a briefing on preparations for the Tribunal's final session. The Committee had found the exchange valuable and had encouraged the civil society organizations to continue to cooperate with each other and to remain in close contact with the Committee and the Division.

23. Lastly, the Committee delegation had held bilateral meetings with officials of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the Director for the Mediterranean and Middle East Region, the Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Director-General for Cooperation and Development. Those officials had reiterated Italy's international political engagement with a view to a two-State solution and support for the Palestinian people in the areas of education, health, gender equality and institution-building.

24. *The Committee took note of the report.*

Provisional programme for the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, Addis Ababa, 29 and 30 April 2013

25. **The Chair** drew attention to the provisional programme for the 2013 United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine. Meeting participants would review the situation of Palestine as a State under occupation, discuss the responsibility and accountability of the occupying Power under international law and assess lessons drawn from the experience of African countries in ending colonization and achieving sovereignty and independence. The Meeting would also analyse the contributions of international and regional organizations, as well as civil society, to the achievement of peace in the region. Invitations had been sent to renowned experts on the issue, representatives of Member States, observers, parliamentarians, and representatives of United Nations entities, international organizations, civil society and the media.

26. **Mr. António** (Observer for the African Union) welcomed the decision to hold the Meeting in Addis Ababa, which was the birthplace of the African Union. He reiterated the Union's solidarity with the Palestinian people, noting that a resolution or decision in support of Palestine had been adopted at every meeting of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government and that the African Union Summit had welcomed the change in the status of Palestine in the United Nations.

27. *The provisional programme was adopted.*

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.